

Emery County Profile

Prepared for the:
Dixie, Fishlake & Manti-La Sal National Forests
Forest Plan Revision
Social and Economic Assessment

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EMERY COUNTY OVERVIEW



*Utah State Historical Society,
Beehive History: Utah Counties.
1988.*

County Land Ownership

72.2% — Bureau of Land Mgt.

11.7% — State Trust Lands

8.3% — Private

7.4% — Forest Service

0.4% — Other

0 % — Wilderness Areas

16.3% — Wilderness Study Area
(within BLM total)

source: SITLA, 2003

County Planned Uses

87.9% — Mining and Grazing

8.5% — Critical Environment

0.1% — Industrial

3.5% — Agriculture

source: Emery County

This overview contains observations drawn from the maps, economic and demographic trend data, and a review of county plans contained in this profile. In addition, it contains comments and explanations of county leaders and residents, gathered at workshops conducted to review this assessment.

Landscape

Emery County is one of the largest in this study area and covers diversity of landscapes. The western side of the county is the most populated and contains numerous small communities residing in an agricultural valley that roughly parallels the Manti National Forest to the west. Streams originate in the Wasatch Plateau on the forest and their headwaters are stored in several reservoirs. Agricultural areas depend on these reservoirs and waterways for survival and some farmland communities struggle with excess salinity. The east side of the county is dry with rough terrain. Green River, the largest community on this side of the county, is more closely tied to the communities and economy of Grand County. Emery County's maps show the importance of the forest lands to the local communities as there are very few significant groundwater aquifers in the area.

Population

County population counts have fluctuated slightly up and down over the last two decades, but projections are for slow annual growth over the next thirty years. Historic population trends can be closely attributed to the state of the mining industry in the county. Emery County's population is aging and is expected to continue along this trend.

Economy

Livestock and farming were the mainstays of Emery County's economy for much of its history. The opening of large coal mines and the construction of large power plants in Castle Dale and Huntington in the 1970s changed the economy significantly and the population grew sharply. High wages in this sector initially created high average incomes, but depressed markets for coal and coalbed methane, along with improvements in mining technology, have slowed or postponed this sector for some time. As a result, unemployment has remained higher than that of the State since 1990. The County still contains extensive natural resources that could be tapped, but the jobs produced from new mining activity may be at a similar level as those replaced by technology.

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Current Issues

OHVs and ATVs

RS 2477 roads

Wild & Scenic Rivers

air quality

watersheds

wildlife and hunting access

logging on private lands

fire management

dispersed camping

Currently the government, trade and services sectors are staples of the economy and are projected to remain so. The County is eager to develop new sources of employment in technology, light manufacturing, and the tourism industry, especially destination tourism and guide services. Interstate 70 also provides an economic development attraction to the east side of the County. Emery County economic development plans are largely concerned with maintaining utilization of public lands in the County, which make up over 90% of the County.

Planning

Better land and water management is an overarching concern because it is the lifeblood of the County. The county would also like to maintain high standards for logging and mining, both on public and private land. They also want to ensure local hunting and fishing access. Off-road vehicle use and dispersed camping are becoming increasingly popular and its management a greater concern. An additional concern is the designation of roads by RS 2477. The county considers the right-of-ways recognized by the RS 2477 to be roads.

Emery County General Plan, 1996

Emery County Business & Economic Development Assessment, 2001

Economic Diversification Action Plan, 1995

Emery Water Conservancy District, Water Management Plan, 1999

Economic and Fiscal Impacts of Coalbed Gas Drilling in Central Utah, 1995

Castle Valley Railroad Regional Economic Impact & Market Potential of the Emery Mine, 2002